DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 359 515 CS 213 891

AUTHOR	Purves, Alan C.
TITLE	Towards a Revaluation of Reader Response and School Literature. Report Series 1.8.
INSTITUTION	National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning, Albany, NY.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	93
CONTRACT	R117G10015
NOTE	24p.
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Classroom Environment; Cultural Context; *Language Arts; Literature; Multicultural Education; *Reader Response; *Reader Text Relationship; Reading Writing Relationship; Secondary Education; Written Language
IDENTIFIERS	*Aesthetic Reading; Author Reader Relationship; Educational Issues; Response to Literature

ABSTRACT

This paper reconsiders the nature of literature as a school subject. Musing on three anomalies that occur when language arts teachers consider their professions about school literature and what occurs in literature classrooms: (1) the anomaly of the text and the textbook; (2) the anomaly of the idolatry of naive readers whose heads have been "stuffed"; and (3) the anomalous role of the writer in literature and writing programs, the paper contends that these anomalies only serve to trivialize literature in schools. Exploring the nature of the "rules of the game" of school literature in the United States, the paper argues that school literature programs must treat literary texts as works of art and that literature programs need to be integrated into a broader context of the language arts. The paper questions the role of literature and literature education in American society and asserts that such a resource should serve as the cornerstone of education in a democratic society. The paper concludes that students must be helped to connect the way they read to the way they write, to develop a sense of pleasure in the medium of language and in the exploration of the culture of the writer and of the community of readers in the classroom. (Contains 19 references.) (SAM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED359515

Towards a Revaluation of Reader Response and School Literature

Alan C. Purves

National Research Center on Literature Teaching & Learning
UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY • SUNY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS213891

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Literature Center

School of Education • 1400 Washington Avenue • Albany, New York 12222

Towards a Revaluation of Reader Response and School Literature

Alan C. Purves

National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning
University at Albany
State University of New York
1400 Washington Avenue, Albany, New York 12222

Report Series 1.8

1993

Preparation of this report was supported under the Educational Research and Development Center Program (Grant number R117G10015) as administered by the Office of Research, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The findings and opinions expressed here do not neccessarily reflect the position or policies of the sponsoring agency.

National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning

The National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning is a research and development center located at the University at Albany, State University of New York. The Center was established in 1987 (as the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature), and in January 1991 began a new, five-year cycle of work administered by the Office of Research, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The Center's mission is to conduct research and sponsor activities to improve the teaching and learning of literature, preschool through grade 12, in schools across the nation.

Center-sponsored research falls into three broad areas: teaching and learning processes, curriculum and assessment, and social and cultural traditions in the teaching and learning of literature. Special attention is given to the role of literature in the teaching and learning of students at risk for school failure, and to the development of higher-level literacy skills, literary understanding, and critical thinking skills in all students.

For information on current publications and activities, write to: Literature Center, School of Education, University at Albany, 1400 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12222.

Toward A Revaluation of Reader Response and School Literature[1]

Alan C. Purves
SUNY, University at Albany

> If Ms. B. wants to know the answers to these questions [about a novel that has been assigned], Dad, why doesn't she read it herself? (William C. Purves)

Having spent a good part of my life studying reader response and literature in the schools, I intend in this paper to reconsider the nature of literature as a school subject. In doing so, I take as starting point the question posed to me several years ago by my son who had been chastised by his fourth-grade teacher for not writing out the answers to a set of questions assigned with a novel. It seems to me that his plaint stems from a popular perspective about the reading of literature, and raises very real problems when we consider what it is we are doing when we have the audacity to bring literature into the classroom. The problem may be stated as being that we err when we even consider that reading a literary work in schools is anything like what we think of as reading for pleasure.

I take as a second starting point three anomalies that can be seen when we consider our professions about school literature and what occurs in school literature: the anomaly of the text and the textbook; the anomaly of our idolatry of naive readers whose heads we have stuffed; and the anomalous role of the writer in literature and writing programs. Together, these anomalies serve to trivialize literature in schools. In taking them up, I want to hold a mirror up to what we do, to explore the nature of the "game" of school literature in the United States. In seeking to set forth the rules of this very serious game, however, I shall further note my concern that the current form of the game serves to trivialize literature in the classroom and in the minds of the public and make it as vulnerable as Latin and foreign languages. This leads me, then, to the broad question of the role of literature (and literature education) in our society, which merits reconsideration and a revaluation in order to save it from its supposed friends and make it the cornerstone of education in a democratic society.

---

[1]This paper was originally prepared as one of the Distinguished Lecture Series for the 1992 convention of the National Council of Teachers of English, November 21, 1992. I am grateful for the comments from the audience as well as the extended comments of Beverly Chin, Patrick Dias, and Joseph Quattrini, all of whom helped me to clarify my arguments.

Three Anomalies

The Anomaly of the Text and the Textbook

When my son and other children and adults talk about reading, they are often talking about the reading of a poem or a story in a magazine or a book; perhaps about the reading of a novel. These are the literary texts that we pick up voluntarily. They are surrounded by a cover, a dust-jacket with some information about the author, and perhaps a brief introduction or even a footnote or two. Consider the fact that for the most part, 75% of the text we are reading appears to be produced by an author, the rest provided by the publisher. I use the word "appears," because we know in how many instances there may have been others involved. As Jack Stillinger has pointed out in his recent volume, many of the classics are in fact the result of the efforts not of a single writer, but of a group (Stillinger, 1991). Keats's poems went through several hands before they were published; his manuscript is not what we read and study. So, too, is the case of most of the authors that we read.

When we look at a literary text placed in a school literature anthology, we will find that the text has new surroundings. There is a unit or chapter introduction, a text introduction with biographical and other contextual information. Around the text will be notes and vocabulary. Following the text will be vocabulary drills, questions for literal comprehension, questions for inferential comprehension (as if there is any difference at all between the two), activities to do in class, and several writing assignments. There may also be an illustration or two. Now we find that perhaps 50% of the text material is produced by the author (less if it is a lyric poem). The rest is produced by unknown hordes.

Put very baldly, the physical text in a literature classroom frequently becomes a different object from what it is in the broader world of literature about which critics write so much. Even the class sets of a paperback novel will have various school insignia grafted on to them to signal that the readers are part of a different culture. This difference prefigures a difference between the reading of the text in a classroom and the reading of a text in a living room.

The Anomaly of Our Idolatry of "Naive" Readers Whose Heads We Have Stuffed

A current ideology among some advocates of a reader-response pedagogy is that naive readers are "better" readers. They engage in this adaptation of the idea of the noble savage in order to attack such aspects of school literature programs as the teaching of literary terminology, generic study, and literary history. They lump these all under the name of "cultural literacy," product focus, "traditional teaching," or "new criticism." In their place they would have readers engage in a form of group soul searching. But from all the years of research into real readers in school, we know that readers are not naive, they have something in their heads that has been put there by past experiences, particularly with literature and schooling in literature. Many of the research studies conducted since the 1920s and including those at the National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning, have established the point that readers bring a great deal

to the text, both substantive knowledge of literature and (more importantly) procedural knowledge about ways of reading and talking about what one has read. What they bring is, in great part, the product of the culture of school literature which inculcates ways of reading texts and talking about them. Both acts have to be paced, (40 pages a night, for example); both have to focus on particular aspects of meaning, both have to follow set rules.

Six years of basals or of whole language combined with three years of literature classrooms as well as thirteen years of television and other forms of reading, listening, and viewing means that secondary school students are not naive readers, they have been conditioned to be readers of a certain sort. They have learned many of the conventions of literature and of human action and appearance, as well as many literary conventions and genres. They know the stereotypes that are a part of literature and of cultural literacy. All of these are necessary to our reading of literature; the assumption that readers know them is part of the writer's stock in trade (Rabinowitz, 1987). What they have acquired is not as static as what E.D. Hirsch (Hirsch, 1987) puts into his lists, but they are culturally literate in some degree.

Student readers have also been acculturated into habits of reading, into dealing with literature in school in particular ways, into what researchers have called response preferences. These preferences operate at a deeper level than the knowledge base of a list of cultural terms, and they determine how we read. Hirsch's knowledge is specific and perhaps superficial knowledge, the other is general knowledge; it is a far more pervasive form of cultural literacy. The large majority of United States students report that they are moralizing symbol hunters. They report that they read to take tests on what is read, and if they cannot figure the hidden meaning, they turn to Cliff's notes. (Many teachers do the same, but we call the notes the Teacher's edition.) This is what they share in class, and the transcripts of student discussion in student-centered classrooms reported by researchers are as exciting as they appear to readers and editors of our journals because the students do what we tend to like and feel comfortable with (Langer, 1989). The students raise issues of morals, motives, symbols, and implications and they are exciting because they personalize and problematize these issues rather than utter slogans. They talk well about these issues, using detail and reference to the text and their own experience. Substantively, however, they discuss the same issues as students in other more traditional or teacher dominated classes. What they discuss, moreover, represents only a part of the possible range of things that might be discussed--such topics as aesthetics, style, history, language, or comparison with the other arts. The students are acculturated into reading texts but most particularly into raising only those questions about texts that are currently sanctioned as critically valid in United States classrooms. In this they are paralleled by students in other countries who learn to ask different questions.

The Anomalous Roles of the Reader and Writer in School Programs

The anomaly here is one of mixed messages brought about by the general war within the profession between the "writing" people and the "literature" people in the university, a war which has been going on for at least two generations and the fallout of which is visible in the secondary school. The literature program, in particular the reader-response based program advances the

importance of reading and of reading in a way which negates the importance of the writer as a fabricator of text. This argument works like this; readers *make* meaning; they do not discover it. The premise behind this approach is that the literary text exists apart from the author. It is, to use some of the analogies, a statue, a score for the performance of the reader, an icon. The author is unimportant.

At the same time, writing instruction over the course of the past two decades has focused on the "composing process," and on the idea of planning, drafting, revising and editing. It has focused on issues of audience and suggested that writing is communication. It has suggested that writers are important people who have ideas and want to indite them. Writers *make* and direct meaning in texts, they are not simply stenographers or the creators of random selections of words from which readers make meaning. The writing process curriculum privileges the writer; the reader-response curriculum privileges the reader (as did the new criticism before it, although it defined the reader somewhat differently).

I have stated both positions, to be sure, as extreme positions concerning the nature of text in the world; and they are not the only positions as many have acknowledged. There is the Aristotelian position that the text is a mirror of the world and the poststructuralist position that the text exists in an autonomous world of words and other texts. These two positions, however, do not, I believe, enjoy as strong a hold on the curriculum in the secondary school. The position of the author-directed text and that of the reader-based text, however, seem to me to present to observers, as well as potentially to students, a bifurcated vision rather than a binocular one.

The Rules of the School Literature Game

We appear then to have a problem: School literature is different from reading literature outside of school, but the lack of awareness of those differences as well as the lack of a unified rhetorical theory of school literature that relates it to school writing causes the subject to appear chaotic. How may we approach the issue and thus think of the proper role for school literature as a subject. Literature in the schools is commonly seen as a part of General Education. First, let us remember that "general education" refers both to the curriculum and the population, education for the general population, and that which is common. It is neither an elite subject nor a frill. It must take its proper place in the school curriculum or else it will go the way of foreign languages and the arts. We may begin our examination with two key points.

<u>The School View of Literature is Not the Same as the Popular View</u>

This point arises from the question raised by William Purves and states that school literature must be defined as occurring within a legitimate context that differs from other contexts in which literature might be found. It would be futile to seek to make school be like the world outside school when it cannot be; school exerts its own reality and influences the ways in which a particular subject (mathematics) or activity (writing) is construed. Regardless of the ideology behind them, schools are divorced from the communities in many ways, although they

may well cause people to reflect upon those communities.

If we consider the array of language functions, purposes for reading, and contexts in which reading takes place, we see that the distinctions that have operated for the past decades in discussing school reading and, by extension, school literature, are woefully narrow. Although Louise Rosenblatt rendered an admirable service in observing that poems are not instructional manuals as many schools so treat them (Rosenblatt, 1978), we need to explore the nature of discourse, the act of reading, and the situation of the reader further (see Table 1).

Table 1

Functions of language/discourse	**Purposes for reading**	**Contexts for reading**
Metalingual	Ludic	Solitary/familial
Expressive	Efferent	Academic
Referential	Aesthetic	Religious
Conative	Proactive	Communal
Poetic	Spiritual	Commercial
Phatic	Hermeneutic	Governmental
	Ritual	

Written discourse, like oral discourse, has a number of functions, which have been classified by Roman Jakobson in a grouping that has become familiar to us through such people as James Britton and James Kinneavy (*metalingual*, to define language; *expressive*, to express feelings; *referential*, to inform others about ourselves or the world; *conative*, to persuade others; *poetic*, to be an object of contemplation; and *phatic*, to keep in touch with the other party). These functions are generally functions as seen by the producer of the discourse, although they may also be discerned by the listener or reader. The functions are observable in the features of the discourse as well as in its location, so that we may distinguish news, editorial, and advertisement in a newspaper. We may also distinguish the various pieces of mail that we receive--from the picture postcard, to the advertisement, to the love letter (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975; Jakobson, 1959; Kinneavy, 1980).

When we consider the reader alone, the person who picks up a text (if it is portable) and

chooses to read it, that reader may have one (or more) of a number of purposes: to be pleased; to be informed; to take action; to have a spiritual experience; to interpret and speculate; to have an aesthetic experience; and to take part in a ritual. The first kind of reading, to be pleased, is what Victor Nell has called *ludic* reading, reading as pleasure in and of itself (Nell, 1988). It differs from but complements the reading we do when we read a poem, where the pleasure may lie in the aesthetic contemplation of the object. It also differs from the kind of reading we do with many school texts, literary and non-literary, where we are seeking to understand the "meaning" of the text; to interpret it according to a set of guidelines for interpretation. This kind of reading I would call hermeneutic. All of these differ from reading in order to take away information or to follow a procedure as in the reading of a manual accompanying a piece of software. They also differ from the sort of reading that many do in religious settings, where the reading becomes a part of the ritual. Each of these purposes may change into another during the course of the act of reading and the purposes may be multiple in any one sitting, just as the functions of discourse are multiple in a text of any length. *Moby Dick*, for example, was designed as a poetic expression, although it contains lengthy referential sections. We may read the entire book in order to be pleased; we also find ourselves informed and engaged in the act of interpreting the text; many find aesthetic pleasure in considering its structure and language.

We also know that reading takes place in a number of contexts including the home, the workplace, the academy, the community, the religious institution, government, the place of commerce. The context changes the physical way in which we read, it may also influence the way in which we see the discourse and the purpose we have for reading. Such variation has been admirably pointed out by many anthropological works on literacy in diverse settings.

Discourse function, purpose for reading, and context can intersect in a number of ways (see Table 1). When we read a valentine card in a shop to select the one we want to send, the context and the purpose shift from that of reading the same text after opening the envelope on Valentine's Day. Even within a context such as a school, there can be a number of different purposes and functions related to the texts that we and our students read. Louise Rosenblatt pointed to the problem in literature teaching in which efferent and aesthetic reading are confused, when students treat literary texts as if they were social studies textbooks.

Judith Langer (1989) has suggested that the difference between efferent and aesthetic reading in school lies less in the way we read than in the end of the reading (thus affecting the manner of class discussion about the reading): in one kind (the efferent) we want students to give a clear answer about the text's meaning; in the other (the aesthetic) we want them to explore a range of possible meanings. This second, exploratory, more open-ended sort of reading is what I think I would call hermeneutic, but not necessarily aesthetic nor ludic. This view of reading rests on an epistemological assumption that meaning resides in the negotiation among readers in an interpretive community, not in the text, in authorial intention, nor in the individual statement concerning the significance of the text. The readers are enjoined to look for a range of meanings and interpretations and to share them, not to respond as did my son. Issues of form and style and issues of authorship, culture, and history generally do not form a major part of the discussion. Reading literature in United States schools is not intended to be the same as reading for pleasure, nor is it necessarily reading for an aesthetic experience. Many teachers frown on what some

would call the aesthetic response, the judgment of the quality of the work and the justification of that judgment on the discussion of form and structure, not to mention history. They do so in part because such a response raises a question of taste and in part because it challenges the very existence in the classroom of the texts that have been selected. Many also tend to frown on oral interpretation or artistic expression as a form of demonstrating understanding; in part because they do not know how to deal with it. The reading of literature has an end of exploratory interpretation, an end of argument and speculation, that which makes the reading of those texts like the reading of other "open" documents, philosophy and speculative prose as well as some expressive and conative prose. Our ideal for the student is to participate in the humanities seminar or take part in an intellectual talk show.

School Literature Programs Form a Legitimate Context for Reading Literature

Students whom I have studied over the past years report that they perceive school literature as reading literary texts in order to take tests on them. When I report this, many teachers of English gasp in horror. But are not the students right? School is where you are supposed to learn something and other people determine whether you have learned that something by giving tests. The problem is that the something and the form of testing are often trivializing. The tests the students report taking and that I have studied are frequently atrocious, calling for low-level recall and the derivation of a set theme; but the tests need not be this way. I must reiterate an argument I have made for a broad-based assessment of what to me, as to many, seems the legitimate concern of school literature programs. The assessment must underscore and validate the broad goals of the school literature curriculum as it has developed.

The Literature Center studies on curriculum and assessment have shown that the domain of school literature can be divided into three interrelated aspects: knowledge, practice, and habit (Brody, deMilo, & Purves, 1989; Li, Purves, & Shirk, 1991). The interrelationships are complex in that one uses knowledge in the various acts that constitute the practice and habits, and that the practices and habits can have their influences on knowledge. At the same time one can separate them for the purposes of curriculum planning and testing. I have schematized the three sub-domains as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

School Literature

Knowledge		Practice		Preferred habits	
Textual	**Extra-textal**	**Responding**	**Articulating**	**Aesthetic habits**	**Choice**
Specific text	History	Decoding	Retelling	Evaluating	Reading
Cultural allusion	Author	Summarizing	Criticizing single works	Selecting	Criticizing
	Genres	Analyzing	Valuing		
	Styles	Personalizing	Generalizing across works		
	Critical terms	Interpreting			

Knowledge is divided into knowledge of that which is contained in texts, such as allusions to myths and folk tales and of the world surrounding the writing and criticism of texts. As I have suggested, this aspect of the curriculum is in some disfavor, except for the knowledge of literary terms, but remains a staple of the middle-school curriculum. *Practice* is divided into *responding* to cover reading, watching, listening; *articulating* to cover speaking and writing about individual texts or about literature in general. Responding includes decoding or making out the plain sense of the text or film, and particularly coming to some whole impression and recreation of what is read in summary form, as well as the more detailed aspects of analyzing, personalizing, and interpreting. Often people give a vague gist without analyzing or establishing the grounds of that gist; this is called giving the main idea or the theme. *Articulating* covers a wide variety of ways by which students let people know what their response is. This is the key to the curriculum in many ways. It is not just reading in a closet but bringing an impression of what is read out into the open. Like any school subject, literature demands public evidence of, as well as conclusions that might be true of the subject outside of school. Proofs are not necessary in mathematical applications outside of school; essays about one's reading of a text are not required after reading every library book.

Habits, a term taken from Pierre Bourdieu, refers broadly to the set of attitudes, stances, and beliefs encouraged through instruction whether formal or informal. It could be seen as being a superordinate aspect since it includes the establishment in students' minds of the preferred

kinds of knowledge and practice. Bourdieu argues that one should not look at only the individual writer as an independent agent nor at only the cultural pressures on individual readers as exerting monolithic influence, but at the idea of *habitus* or disposition, the "durable and transposable set of principles of perception, appreciation, and action, capable of generating practices and representations that are (usually) adapted to the immanent demands of the world, without being the product of an intentional search for adaptation." (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 29). That is to say, the idea of *habitus* helps us understand the ways in which individuals act in the context of others. Individuals do some things as a matter of conscious volition; other things they do by habit. They are disposed to do them, and school and other educational institutions reinforce and direct those dispositions. In the terms of Soviet psychology, many activities that people undertake become acts and operations, matters of habit that have been internalized and made automatic. A few remain the object of conscious attention. As Bourdieu says, "I am included in a space, located in a space but, at the same time, I have a point of view on the space, I am able actively to construe and to construct it. But I construct this space on the basis of interests, dispositions, and cognitive structures which are related to the position I occupy in that space" (Bourdieu, p. 23). School literature programs, like other school programs, seek and have sought to provide the basis for our populace's construction of the world.

Using Bourdieu's analytic premise, we might further describe the kind of reader that I have been discussing as a creature of habit. The school reader exists in a field of school reading which has developed in that reader a set of habits of mind about how to read and how to talk about what has been read. That is why the secondary school students in the United States tend to focus on the same features of the text and to look for its moral content. Individuals do vary from that habitual approach to literature, but the habit is strong as my various studies have shown. United States students differ from students in other countries who have acquired different habits of reading and articulating their responses to what they have read (Purves, 1973). Some habits, like those of the Italian historically minded students or the British students' focus on image and metaphor, are the products of an educational system that trains the mind. We may critique our habits of mind and we often want to substitute new habits, but we are generally in favor of the idea of developing approved habits of mind.

Bourdieu's view of the individual being situated in a community parallels the writing of many who have dealt with culture and literature and writing. The view that we are simultaneously individuals, changing, and members of a larger community concurs with that of Ashok Kelkar which sees the "poem-encounter" or "transaction" as situated within a system and related to other transactions. The transactions are individual, but not unique (Kelkar, 1969). Thinking of them as unique is the error, I believe, in much of the writing about response-based teaching; it is similar to the fallacy of naiveté. To be conservative, 50 million United States citizens share the experience of having read *Romeo and Juliet*, and another 50 million have seen a film version. To what extent is that a common or general education? Viewers and readers alike have clearly learned some different things about it, had different experiences of it, and had somewhat diverse responses to it. In Louise Rosenblatt's terms, there have been 100 million transactions resulting in perhaps 40 million poems (the rest being efferent readings). How are these poems related to each other? How are they related to the text? How are they related to some sort of common *Romeo and Juliet*?

Perhaps the best way to think of this phenomenon is to take the analogy from linguistics of type and token (Kelkar, 1969). There is the "poem-text" which is the source of all "poem-tokens," the form taken by the poem each time it is read. The relationship between the two is analogous to the relation between the poem-text and some idealized poem. The text of *Romeo and Juliet* exists in schools in the Yale or the Penguin or the Kitteridge or some other "type" which is relatively invariant as each copy emerges from the bindery. It may be modified by having taped or marked pages, high-lighters, or sidenotes, but it remains essentially the same, just as the phrase *Romeo and Juliet* remains relatively the same despite whether it is printed, written, capitalized, or the like. Each of those is a token, and each student reading *Romeo and Juliet* in a class is making a *Romeo and Juliet*-token. What is the relation of the *Romeo and Juliet*-tokens to the *Romeo and Juliet*-type? I would suggest that as a result of our educational system which has developed certain habits in readers of several generations, the tokens can be clustered into some general sets: the romantic token, the *West Side Story* token, the socio-political token, the tragic token, and the generation-gap token might be a few. The habituated poem-token within our society is another way of thinking about the misconception of the naive reader. Because of the developed habit of reading and doing school reading of literature, we should talk less about individual readings than about communal readings, less about the reader's response and more about the habituated discourse about texts.

Let me not be misconstrued concerning the development of habits. They are a necessary part of our having an educational system and our being a society. They are what constitute us as a culture of readers; they are not to be attacked in the name of individualism. That would be a fallacious claim for it would seek to deny the very importance of our collective nature, our necessary community. I would argue that we should be more conscious about these habits than we have been and that we take pride in our success as well as raise our own consciousness about what we are doing. To take another example: In order to preserve the literary nature of the text, and treat a work of literature like *Moby Dick* as a novel and not as a treatise on whales, students must practice and learn how to perform this kind of reading and they must be encouraged to read this way voluntarily. They do this through being encouraged to talk about certain facets of the text and their experience of it and not to talk about others. They are encouraged to see themselves as the makers of meaning and that meaning is what they negotiate with the teacher and with the "authority" that appears to reside in Cliff's Notes or the Teacher's Guide. Above all, they are encouraged to talk and write about the text; they cannot respond as William did in my epigraph; no more can they simply parrot Cliff's notes as if it were the only interpretation. What is encouraged as well as what is discouraged become a part of their *habitus* as school readers. The curriculum, then, seeks to promote habits of mind in reading and writing.

Another set of these habits which it would appear that we seek to inculcate is less obvious, but to my mind no less important; it concerns the way people make aesthetic judgments about the various texts read and to justify these judgments publicly. Since literature education is supposed to develop something called "taste" or the love of "good literature," the curriculum looks beyond reading and writing to the formation of specific sets of preferences and habits of reading and writing. It may include the development of a tolerance for the variety of literature, of a willingness to acknowledge that many different kinds and styles of work can be thought of as literature, and of an acceptance that just because we do not like a certain poem, does not mean

that it is not good. The development of such habits of mind should lead students to the acceptance of cultural diversity in literature, and, by extension, in society. These are often cited as parts of the curriculum in school literature, but they loom less large in the minds of students and teachers because they are not part of the assessed curriculum; in addition, we know less how to handle the student who is recalcitrant in these habits.

The school curriculum can also lead students to develop a taste based on an awareness of the meretricious or the shoddy use of sentiment or language. Experienced readers of literature can see that they are being tricked by a book or a film even when the trickery is going on--and they can enjoy the experience. Like advertising and propaganda, literature manipulates the reader or viewer. The conscious student can be aware of such manipulation and value the craft at the same time as discerning the motives that lie behind it. One problem with this sort of habit is that it tends to run counter to the habit that is taught in social studies which views all of the same devices as propaganda and the object of scorn not enjoyment. I would argue that the view that literature courses advocate is preferable for it is a part of the inculcation of a delight in language and its very playfulness.

Reconsidering the Function of School Literature

To recapitulate, the legitimate role of school literature is to be concerned with knowledge, practice, and habit. The appropriate mix of these three aspects of the curriculum, however, has long been the source of tension among various camps. Our literature curriculum has a complex history in which one of the three parts is often emphasized over the others. In outlining the culture of the Anglo-American literature curriculum, John Willinsky argues that school literature is emblematic of the thinking of four people: Matthew Arnold, F. R. Leavis, Louise Rosenblatt, and Northrop Frye (Willinsky, 1991). The problem is that the four do not easily sit together in ruling a curriculum. In Willinsky's formulation, Matthew Arnold espouses an approach to literature that would lead to the disinterested critic who judges all by the "classical ideal"; Leavis would have students learn the great tradition of moral literature and the use of literature in society; Frye would have readers learn of the great myths and structural themes that make literature what it is; and Rosenblatt would have readers use literature to explore the world of the self, the worlds of the writer and to enhance the aesthetic experience of the individual. What we teach and how we think about literature and get our students to think about it is an amalgam of the thoughts of these four people, but the precise mix of that amalgam is changeable and the source of contention.

These four writers recapitulate the tensions of the literature curriculum over the past hundred and fifty years, tensions that have been described by many critics (Applebee & Purves, 1992; van de Ven, 1987). The curriculum has moved from view to view; from classical to moral, to formal, to personal. In the United States today, Arnold is in with the National Endowment for the Humanities, Leavis with the champions of the Moral Majority and the censors, Frye with the Advanced Placement program, and Rosenblatt is sheltered under the Whole Language umbrella.

The tensions are to some extent resolved in the schools through tracking programs.

Students in lower tracks are expected to focus on low-level comprehension. If they are to be critics at all, it is at the level of finding the "efferent" moral tag. Students in the upper tracks are supposed to approach literature in a more academic and structural way and to focus on the traditional canon. Students in the middle are encouraged to start from a reader-response approach only to be shunted to a more formalistic or reading comprehension view of the text (Applebee, 1990). Although this may be the way in which the curriculum operates, I do not think that the approach to school literature and its teaching should be a matter of what our perception of the students might be. Such is not a view that is consonant with the idea of general education. I believe we should take a more synoptic view. I also believe there is something missing if we focus our whole instruction on encouraging the articulation of readers' responses and on the development of habits, as I think has been the current trend. Reader-response approaches to teaching and the idea of the student-centered curriculum have not lived up to what I see as the balance of a response-centered literature curriculum, which I should like to relate to an integrated approach to the language arts. To that end, I propose that we need to think of the place of that entity called *literature* in a literature program. A literature program should not be a reading program with trade books, nor should it be merely a vehicle for "critical thinking" which is the fashion in many secondary programs. It should have some elements of a Literature program.

School Literature Programs should be seen as valorizing literature

The question of what we do when we teach literature is intimately tied to the role of literature in society. Literature as a construct is relatively new in human history, going back to the Renaissance and Reformation, to the beginning of the idea of secular and humane knowledge (Reiss, 1992). Literature has had a checkered career as an idea and as a force in the schools. In the view of Arnold, and his disciple, T.S. Eliot, literature is a culturally cohesive force, so that the reading of certain works of literature enables people to come together. Such was the case made for establishing and teaching national literatures. It has been the impetus behind the artistic and pedagogic efforts of emerging nations from the United States and Finland (to cite two of the older emerging nations) to Indonesia, Ghana, and Croatia. Within countries, the literature of a group has helped rally separatist strains or diverse strains within a larger polity (such as Scottish literature, or the literature of Quebec, or of Afro-American literature).

Literature has also been seen as having a moral force. Such is the impetus behind the criticism and pedagogy of such people as Matthew Arnold, Irving Babbitt, and F.R. Leavis. It was also the guiding force behind McGuffey and the developers of other primers. It was so envisioned in much of American pedagogy that derived from Dewey, and its negative version appears in the comments of various pundits who would censor literature and television as causes of the degradation of American moral fiber. The moral force is not simply one of ethical precepts and codes for clean living, but of a set of challenges to and explorations of the major moral issues that beset the species and the planet.

In the academic world of the United States, the national and moral aspects of literature have received scant attention for nearly half a century. In 1938, Louise Rosenblatt raised the banner for seeing literature as a moral force in education (Rosenblatt, 1976). She did so against

a tide that sought to find the purity of poetry, the verbal icon, the poem that did not mean but be, and the aspiration of all poetry to the condition of music. It was this tide that brought about the sorts of close reading and analysis that many advocates of the hermeneutic approach use as a stalking horse or straw man. In recent years, however, her approach to literature has been construed as a critique of the moral view; aesthetic reading has little to do with morals. Reader-response criticism has followed new criticism in isolating.the work from author and nation and from the very idea of possible meaning. Poststructuralism has placed literature in a world of language divorced from reality and from the world. It is something to play games with, an elaborate form of mental gymnastics and puzzle solving. All of these approaches to literature have served to trivialize it and render its place in the curriculum suspect. Currently, we see literature as a pleasant way of teaching reading at the elementary level, and as one of a number of ways of teaching the rules of civilized discussion and argumentative writing. But, literature has little value.

If there is to be a value to literature and its study, a part of that value should lie in the presumed worth of particular texts, of a canon. A canon says to the citizenry that some common experiences are critical to the very idea of being a citizen. It asserts that the curriculum is not based on "any old book" but on those books which refuse to be overlooked, that insist on our coming to terms with them. We assert a canon in citing the Gettysburg Address or *The Wizard of Oz* or *Malcolm X*. I will not argue for a particular canon, nor for the traditional canon of dead white European males. Nonetheless, it is important to decide that there exist a number of books that the citizenry of a community *must* read in order to recognize the value and force of literature, in order to make it something more than a vehicle for pleasure like the popular media. If this importance is agreed to, then literature itself has an importance in schools and a rightful place. The struggle then becomes at what level and how the canon is negotiated; how competing cultural interests can be reconciled, and particularly how the many voices of our society can be heard. The important point is that each school must decide that some books should be read and not settle for any book; the crux lies in the principles by which the decision is made.

The Multicultural Approach to Literature

The educational force of a canon lies not only in the text types but in how they are used as tokens. The value of a literature program lies not only in the particular works that are selected but more in the fact that there exists a principle of selection. A canon is after all, a measure not the thing measured. The fact that school literature programs assert a measure for the selection of the texts to be included means that these programs are asserting a principle that lies behind the curriculum. I suggest that this principle can be found in the idea of multiculturalism. It asserts for the United States that there is a vast collection of stories, poems, plays, and other documents written by or about people, some of whom are well-known, others of whom official histories and anthologies have forgotten. The peoples included in these works have come from all corners of the globe. We are a microcosm of the world and we inhabit a global village. Our literature program should reflect that fact. It should also take up the very idea of the constructed habit that Bourdieu has described and make it a part of our study. Bourdieu criticizes "internal analysis," which isolates author and work from its surroundings and "external analysis" which sees author

and work as the working out of a "system." He proposes thinking of the individual writer as in a field that contains a number of points. One way of defining that field is through the concept of culture.

Some of the artists whom we might study came from the peoples who were here before the European discoveries of the islands and continent we call America--the people whom we call the First Nations. Others are those who came as immigrants but not as conquerors; some came as slaves, some came to make up the laboring force that built the railroads or toiled in the factories. They came from Europe and its surrounding islands, from Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent, from China and Japan and other parts of the Pacific rim, from the Caribbean and Central America. They came under cramped conditions, many of them forced to come by people in their homeland who were only too happy to drive them out. Once they got here, they worked long hours in conditions that we would think tortuous; many who worked twelve-hour days were young children.

They produced the literature and art which defines the cultures of our multicultural society; more specifically the ways in which the members of the culture deal with each other. Much of the literature treats the major human and social rituals that help define a culture: birth, maturation, marriage, child-rearing, old age, and death. These rituals exist in the kinds of barriers they establish to keep others out, and they exist in the major defining events of their history. For Blacks in the Americas that defining event is the Diaspora. For African Americans of the United States, that defining event may be more particularly slavery and emancipation. For many Europeans that defining event may be the fact of revolution; for others the brutality of a civil war. For Jews it may be the pogroms or the Holocaust. For the Irish it may be the famine of 1848. For many Latinos it may be Catholicism's supplanting of the Aztec or Mayan religions. For others it may be the fact of dictatorship under Trujillo or the Somozas. For many in the United States it may be Ellis Island. For the Chinese Americans it may be the railroads and the whorehouses of San Francisco. For the Lakota it may be the Battle of Wounded Knee. For the Japanese Americans it may be the internment camps. Nearly all of these defining events are times of tribulation and survival. It is from these defining events as well as from the rituals and ceremonies that the values of a culture emerge.

The fact that literature is an expression of and a lens into these cultures is one of the main ways in which literature is valorized in the eyes of the people of this country. I would add that this cultural approach can be broadened to include a global sweep. At this moment in the history of the world the cultural view of literature is what will sustain it in the schools, more so than the moral view or the universalistic view or the aesthetic view. It may not be the view that will prevail a generation hence; in this decade, however, it is the view which seems best to unite the various perspectives of classicism, moralism, mythos, and personal exploration. It is a basis upon which we can build a literature program.

School literature programs must treat the texts as works of art

There are many other aspects of a culture that express something of its qualities and

values. We can experience other cultures through food, through observing family practices, from observing festivals and other ceremonies. A culture is manifested in its history and its defining moments. But the literature of a culture has turned those various expressions, beliefs, values, and ceremonies into verbal art that complements the plastic arts, music, and dance. That is the feature that many proponents of multiculturalism in schools appear to have forgotten. The writers are habituated into their culture; they are also habituated into the world of art. It is the world of art (in our specific case, of literature) that serves to connect cultures and bring them into relationships with each other.

Regardless of a poet's culture, that poet uses rhythm, imagery, metaphor, typography, grammar, and syntax as the medium of the poem. Regardless of the race of a playwright, that playwright uses the devices of stagecraft to make a play. August Wilson is a major African American playwright; he is a major playwright without qualification. In using his craft he is related to Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, and Frederico Garcia Lorca. Our students deserve to find out something of that shared craft.

The exploration of authors and of their culture must not forget the craft; for it is the craft that in great part produces the aesthetic response, that gives the reader a sense of the beauty of what has been written. The texts are not to be treated as sermons, but as artifacts, objects that have been shaped by an author so as to give power and beauty to a vision of the world. They are written to make us feel and see. They are written to make us respond, and in our responding we need to explore not only ourselves, not only the content of the work, not only the culture of the writer, but the ways in which the writer has shaped and refined language in order to make us respond.

School Literature Programs Need to be Integrated Into a Broader Context of the Language Arts

Not only do we need to bring perspectives on literature and the facets of school literature into harmony with each other, but we need to make the activities surrounding school literature harmonious with the other aspects of language in the school. I believe that we should see readers in the same fashion in which Bourdieu urges that we see writers. The reader is not autonomous nor is the reader simply the product of manipulative external forces, such as a "masculine racist" society. When we look at readers, we must look at them as individuals consciously acting according to habits and situated within a field. One of the fields that we discern about writers and readers is that which we have come to call "culture." A culture is an arbitrary designation and limitation, that which is "imposed" upon an individual and to which the individual affiliates, but that which cannot capture and erase individuality. That is to say, an individual participates in and is molded by a "culture" or cultures so as to have a set of habits which we call cultural. Writers inhabit cultures; so do readers, particularly those readers who are our students.

One question confronting us is that of how we define a culture. Some like E.D. Hirsch and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. want to define it as a national culture; others argue for subnational cultures, perhaps regional, perhaps ethnic, perhaps gendered. The school and the literature program within the school are, as they have always been, acculturating, affiliating agents, but the

policy question is that of the cultural allegiances of the school and the program.

Is there another way to bring these tensions into harmony other than to assert that each token is as valid as every other token or to use the "different strokes for different folks" approach? I think there is, particularly if we return to the broader triangle of writer, text, and reader. This triangle is implicit in the positions of Arnold, Leavis, Frye, and Rosenblatt, but they take different perspectives on it. The writer-text-reader relationship is a self-contained universe each time a reader sits down with a book. It is also a self-contained universe each time a student sits down to write a composition. The writer and reader are not simply convenient fictions but flesh and blood people. Of course there also exist that necessary pair, the "authorial voice" and the "audience." These two constructs are not the same as the writer and reader but what the one infers about or imputes to the other. The two flesh and blood people produce Kelkar's reading token or poem encounter which is necessarily a "poet encounter" as well.

In this way, we see that in literature programs our students are not simply reading texts, they are reading writers. They are invited to bring the author into the equation just as they are invited to bring the reader into the equation when they write. Students do the latter readily as evidenced by each time they say, "But what do you want?" They need to learn to do the former. They also need to acknowledge themselves as people with prejudices, ignorances, beliefs that impinge on their readings and interpretations. They need to see that as they are engaged in the hermeneutic task, they are learning to interpret themselves as readers as well as the authors as writers. They are members of a culture with the habits of that culture engaged in reading the work of inhabitants of other cultures.

A part of that learning is involved in reading the culture as I suggested earlier. Another part can be seen as in the following examples. We can read John Milton's poetry as the work of an Englishman, a defeated and disgraced Protestant radical, a man, and a blind person. All of these additions to our knowledge help us to see a work like *Samson Agonistes* more clearly than if we treated it as anonymous. But we cannot forget it is also part of the larger matrix of drama. We can make the same claim about Gwendolyn Brooks, American, African-American, woman, urbanite, midwesterner, caught up in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s both in the South and in Chicago and its suburbs like Cicero. To know these facets of the poet is to help us read "The Ballad of Rudolph Reed." But we must also read it as a ballad, a poetic object.

In these examples, we are not only reading the writer, but reading the writer in a cultural context and understanding ourselves as culturally situated readers. Where I would say we should plan our instruction in literature is in a marriage of the views of Arnold, Leavis, Frye, and Rosenblatt. I think that we should seek some amalgam so as to assert the importance of literature as a school subject in its own right. That means that we should approach literature as literature in the classroom and we should recognize that there is not only the approach but the literature, some corpus or canon of texts that we value. If we do not do this, literature instruction is going to fade away.

If we follow this approach, we can place school literature in the same context as school writing, which at its best is writing for readers or writing with the reader in mind. This means

careful attention to the audience of each piece of writing, to writing for a variety of audiences and with a variety of purposes. We should not let our students remain in the rut of the response journal, the five-paragraph theme, or the personal narrative. Each of these has its place and its use with a particular function and with a particular set of readers in mind. Each of these has a cultural history. Student writers can explore the culture of readers for different kinds of writing and seek to write for those cultures: they can try the prose for a journal for those in the know such as *Sassy* or *Car and Driver*; and the prose for a more general journal like *Time*. They can explore the culture of readers of newspapers and academic articles. They can interview readers. They can write about their culture for a variety of audiences. They can write up their community's culture. And they need to explore writing artistic creations of their own. The writing of poetry should not be reserved for the creative writing unit or the school magazine.

Above all they need to write for readers. The teacher is one of those readers, but so too are classmates, other teachers, employers, friends, and the media. The reader should not remain in a solipsistic world of response, nor the writer in a solipsistic world of expression; but each takes the author or the audience into account. And not only the author or the audience, but the culture of the author or the audience. Such a cultural view enables the reader or the writer by giving each something to hold onto.

By way of a Conclusion

Literature, that collection of imaginatively created and artistically crafted text, is an important cultural expression and its place in the schools is to bring the young into an understanding of their culture and the cultures that surround them. Since we are a diverse society, that means we have to include the literatures of our diversity. A principle of choice comes from the ideas of Arnold, Leavis, and Frye. The literature must be classic in the sense of being that which is considered by the culture or cultures as clearly representative; it must be literature that explores the morality of the cultures and helps us to understand it; it must be an artistic creation that revels in its own being; and it must be mythic in dealing with the major ceremonies and activities that define the culture. The approach to that literature should follow the principles of Rosenblatt; it should seek to allow students to explore the poems that they make of the texts, it should allow them to explore both the text-world culture and their own culture through the artistic uses of the medium of language. It should not simply assert that there is one meaning (that of the author and the textbook) nor that there are limitless meanings, but that the world of the text and the world of the reader intersect in complex ways so that there are a set of contemporary and communal readings of the text.

I would urge that we conceive of our task in schools to help students read literature to understand the culture, to speculate on the ideas and the imaginative vision, and to speculate on the nature and use of the language that is the medium of the artistic expression. We should help them read literature in order to understand themselves as readers, who they (and we) are, what our habits are, how our culture defines us and how we define it. We should help them use this understanding to build a sure sense of the audience for writing and to develop a sense of the importance of craft. This means helping them learn about the uses of language, about the culture, about the concerns and issues that cause people to enter into the transaction with text, and about

the imaginative uses of language that are designed to give pleasure. It means helping them connect the way they read to the way they write, to develop a sense of pleasure in the medium of language and to exploration of the cultures of the writer and of the community of readers in the classroom.

References

Applebee, A. N. (1990). Literature instruction in American schools (Report No. 1.4). Albany NY: Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature.

Applebee, A. N., & Purves, A. C. (1992). Literature and English language arts. In P. W. Jackson (Eds.), Handbook of research on curriculum (pp. 726-749). New York: Macmillan.

Britton, J. N., Burgess, T., Martin, N., McLeod, A., & Rosen, H. (1975). The development of writing abilities, 11-18. London: McMillan.

Brody, P., deMilo, C., & Purves, A. C. (1989). The current state of assessment in literature (Report No. 3.1). Albany NY: Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature.

Hirsch, E. D. J. (1987). Cultural literacy: What every American should know. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Jakobson, R. (1959). Concluding statement: Linguistics and poetics. In T. A. Sebeok (Eds.), Style in language (pp. 350-377). Cambridge, MA and New York: Technology and Wiley.

Kelkar, A. B. (1969). The being of a poem. Foundations of Language, V(1), 17-33.

Kinneavy, J. L. (1980). A pluralistic synthesis of four contemporary models for teaching composition. In A. Freedman & I. Pringle (Eds.), Reinventing the rhetorical tradition. Fayateville, AK: L & S Books, University of Central Arkansas.

Langer, J. (1989). The process of understanding literature (Report No. 2.1). Albany, NY: Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature.

Li, H., Purves, A. C., & Shirk, M. (1991). Comparison of measures of the domain of learning in literature (Report No. 3.2). Albany, NY: National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning.

Nell, V. (1988). Lost in a book: The psychology of reading for pleasure. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Purves, A. C. (1973). Literature education in ten countries: An empirical study. Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist and Wiksell.

Rabinowitz, P. (1987). Before reading: Narrative conventions and the politics of interpretation. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Reiss, T. J. (1992). The meaning of literature. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1976). Literature as exploration. New York: Noble and Noble.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978). The reader, the text and the poem. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Stillinger, J. (1991). Multiple authorship and the myth of solitary genius. New York: Oxford University Press.

van de Ven, P. H. (1987). Some history of mother tongue teaching in western Europe: A comparative framework. Mother Tongue Education Bulletin, 2(1), 40-50.

Willinsky, J. (1991). The triumph of literature/the fate of literacy: English in the secondary school curriculum. New York: Teachers College Press.